

South Branch Oconto River Fishery Area

[Program Property Page](#)

Other Plans: [1982 Master Plan](#) (not [NR44](#)-compliant); [Interim Forest Management Plan](#)

Property Overview

South Branch Oconto River Fishery Area is a 670-acre property located in west-central Oconto County, northwest of Suring. The property was established in 1961. It is on the southern edge of an extensive area of public lands, including the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Oconto County Forest, and other state-owned lands. The property extends from just east of the Oconto-Menominee county line along 11 miles of stream to where the north and south branches of the Oconto River merge just above Suring. It is a long, narrow property, mainly consisting of a streamside corridor that is 87% forested. Aspen and northern hardwoods are the primary forest types, with lesser amounts of balsam fir, swamp hardwoods, white pine, and hemlock.

The South Branch of the Oconto River is mostly a Class I trout water, with stream conditions ideal for trout growth during the summer. Natural reproduction of both brook and brown trout occur. The lower segment of the South Branch Oconto River (below Highway 32) is a Class II trout water.

Public Use and Recreation Facilities

The South Branch of the Oconto River is very popular for trout fishing, and is also used by paddlers. Five parking areas and primitive or lightly-developed roads facilitate access to the property and the river. The property is also open to hunting, trapping, cross-country skiing, wildlife watching, and gathering of wild edibles.

Natural Resources Management

The South Branch Oconto River Fishery Area began as a water demonstration area. The river flows through an area with mixed agricultural and forestry uses, and early management focused on reducing negative agricultural impacts to the river and improving access for anglers. The value of the property for wildlife habitat was also recognized. The property is currently managed to preserve, protect, and enhance the high-quality fishery, as well as the other habitats present, for recreation and wildlife. Fishery habitat work has included erosion control, cattle watering stations, and in-stream trout habitat installation.

The forest types on the property are managed using sustainable forestry practices, maintaining a variety of successional stages and structural conditions to benefit wildlife and for forest production. Some stands of northern hardwoods as well as hemlock and white pine offer opportunity to manage for older condition and larger-diameter trees. Forest management on the property, as well as on neighboring Oconto County Forest lands, has generally left an uncut buffer of at least one rod (16.5 feet) along the stream bank, with the buffer on most timber sales being considerably greater than this. This riparian management zone is managed passively or with selective harvests that retain significant tree stocking to protect water quality.

Special Attributes

A portion of the South Branch Oconto River Fishery Area is encompassed in the Northeast Wisconsin Forest [Conservation Opportunity Area](#) identified in the [Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan](#).

This segment of the South Branch Oconto River has been designated as an [Outstanding Resource Water \(ORW\)](#). These, along with Exceptional Resource Waters (ERW) are surface waters which provide outstanding recreational opportunities, support valuable fisheries and wildlife habitat, have good water quality, and are not significantly



impacted by human activities. ORWs receive the state's highest protection standards.

Special species management

The Class I portion of the South Branch Oconto River within the Fishery Area is managed for quality trout. Special fishing regulations exist, where two trout over 12 inches may be harvested daily and only artificial lures may be used. Within the Class II segment below Highway 32, the standard county trout regulation of three trout over 8 inches is in effect.

